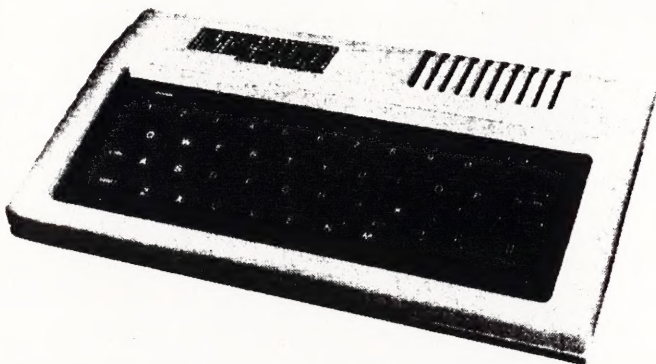


VZ200



The VZ200 is fairly typical of the micros at the bottom end of the price range. It has the now familiar rubber keyboard,

although this one seemed a little more positive than some others I have used. Most keys have four functions: the normal mode gives upper-case and digits, holding down the shift key usually results in a graphic character, while the control key adds single key entry of Basic keywords and screen editing facilities (cursor movement, insert and delete). Simultaneous use of the control and return keys while pressing an ordinary key generates function names and the remaining keywords.

The display is not particularly impressive. The picture quality is fine, but there are only 16 lines of 32 characters. In this mode the 'quarter-square' graphics characters give a resolution of 64 x 32, but there is also a graphics mode giving 128 x 64. This makes the VZ200's graphics look limited

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when compared with those produced by other systems. The choice of colors is similarly restrictive, with two sets of just four colors for graphics; this does improve to eight colors plus black in character mode.

Other points worth mentioning are the provision of separate TV and video outputs, and the generous lead on the plug-pack power supply unit.

The Basic lacks the sophisticated features of the extended Basic found in the Spectravideo and Tandy Color computers. However, it does include primitive graphics commands (SET, RESET and POINT), as well as a SOUND command which generates a tone with a specified frequency and duration. Another feature that is not always found on cheaper machines is a data file facility (using PRINT# and INPUT#). On the subject of files, I found the VZ200's cassette interface to be much more sensitive to volume levels than other micros that I tested. Once I had found the right setting, things went smoothly.

The documentation was another run-of-the-mill affair. The so-called Basic Reference Manual is actually a tutorial, although there is some reference material at the back. An eight page User Manual shows how to set up the system, plus a troubleshooting guide. The final part of the package contains listings of 21 simple programs, a few of which might be useful. Even though they appear to be reproductions of actual listings, there is at least one syntax error present. Another snag is that the copyright notice states "No part of this book may be utilised in any form... without permission in writing from the Publisher", and nowhere does the publisher state that the programs can be used by a VZ200 owner!

The VZ200 was supplied with a 16k RAM pack which was surprisingly bulky. I found it necessary to keep the TV lead away from the RAM pack to avoid interference. The RAM pack comes complete with a tiny screwdriver to remove the cover fitted to the expansion connector on the back of the VZ200 — a very thoughtful idea. There is also a "peripheral" connector, but the only peripheral mentioned in the manuals is a printer interface. Apparently the VZ200 firmware includes screen dump routines for use with a Seikosha GP100 or GP100A printer.

Programs are provided on cassette: I received some serious software like a cash flow program, but mainly games. Perhaps I had been spoiled by the higher quality graphics of other micros, but I wasn't over impressed with all of the games.

Since the VZ200 is (so far as I know) the cheapest home computer on sale in Australia, my comments could be considered harsh. But providing you are aware of its limitations the VZ200 should be good buy.

Processor	Z80
RAM	8k (Unable to determine usable RAM)
ROM	16k <i>6K vscable</i>
Ease of use	★ ★
Ease of programming	★ ★ ★
Expansion and accessories	★ ★
Documentation	★
Presentation	★ ★ ★

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